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This chapter addresses the question of what makes Manfred Kets de Vries “tick?” What “red threads” run through his life? And how has his way of thinking contributed to the world? To explore these questions, the authors use one of his Kets de Vries’ methodologies and put him, metaphorically, on the psychoanalyst’s couch. It will be featured in the forthcoming book *Enduring Thoughts of the Thinkers of Organizational Change* by Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

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Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries: Playing the Morosophe*

by

Elizabeth Florent-Treacy, Konstantin Korotov and Caroline Rook

Introduction

To use some phrases that he might apply himself, what makes Manfred Kets de Vries “tick?” What “red threads” run through his life? How has his way of thinking contributed to the world? To explore these questions we will use one of his own methodologies and put him, metaphorically, on the psychoanalyst’s couch. (Although he would say, “Please don’t overdo the psychoanalysis part. Look at me from some other perspectives as well.”) What significant events have occurred or recurred throughout his life to make him the person he is? Can we see patterns of behavior, and sources of influence? What leitmotifs can we identify?

One of the red threads that runs through the tapestry of Manfred Kets de Vries’s personal and professional life is “Everything is connected.” He brings a unique form of humanistic and scientific thinking to the world of organizations and leadership. The message he

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champions is that explanations can be found for why leaders and organizations go astray; and that there are preventative and remedial ways to treat dysfunctional organizations and restore them to health. Building on this, he has written extensively about sustainably healthy and creative organizations. Why have these particular themes been so important for him? Therein lies a tale.

The morosophe: a fairy tale

Once upon a time, there was a rebellious young Dutch boy, full of life and curiosity. He loved the natural world and spent a great deal of time exploring, fishing and observing the life of insects, birds, and animals. Unlike other children, he was not afraid of angry bulls, or of climbing to the tops of tall trees. When he was tired or worried, or needed anything a child cannot find for himself, he could go to his grandmother, who was a pillar of strength in his life.

The boy lived in a small village in a small country. But his personal “kingdom” extended only past the garden into the nearby meadows, heathland, and woods and it was inhabited by only three characters: himself, a large bear-like creature—a charismatic individual who could be warm and inviting, but could also be aloof—and a badger-lie individual, who was dependable, determined, watchful, protective, and at times, hard-headed. When the boy’s questions and actions tested her patience, the badger would send him down the road to visit the local carpenter, his grandfather. He was a kind man who would give the shirt off his back to anyone in need. But he was also wise in the ways of the world.

One day the boy arrived at the carpenter’s shop to find that he was not at his usual place, and some of his tools were missing from the shelves. The boy sat down to wait for his return. It grew dark, and the boy was hungry. He considered leaving to see if his

grandmother had supper laid out for him, but something held him back. He curled up in a corner and was soon asleep.

He woke up, startled by the sound of the carpenter whispering. His grandfather seemed disheveled, and the boy realized that he was afraid. The carpenter was telling the boy's grandmother a terrible tale. "The evil king from the East has invaded our lands and occupied the country. Now, the invaders are going house to house, to take away and kill anyone with a yellow star. I must use my tools to create hiding places for as many people as I can." As the boy heard these words, he noticed a little mouse, its eyes glinting in the shadows. As the mouse raised a paw to clean its face, the boy understood that he had a powerful gift: the ability to be still and listen and observe in silence. It was an epiphany, and although this was a word he would not hear until much later in his life, the boy immediately recognized the truth that could be learned through silence.

Manfred Kets de Vries writes that fairy tales give us a window into our evolutionary history. They unfold as archetypical journeys and give us insights into our passage through the different phases of our life. They are the metaphoric reflection of significant developmental events.

It is not so difficult to create a kind of fairy tale about Manfred Kets de Vries. Place him in history during a period when Nazi forces were not only occupying Holland, but were also terrorizing his village. Let the young boy—with his gift for silence—help his parents and grandparents harbor *onderduikers*: people who must be hidden and protected.

Soon, the Grüne Polizei (the green-uniformed Nazi police force) surrounded the village. The people around the boy were behaving as though they wore too many layers of clothing. On the outside, the villagers had their normal appearance. But underneath they all wore that heavy extra layer of silence—never, ever look towards the secret places where the onderduikers held their breath. At the center of each villager, there were strata of fear and anger.

It was not long before the Nazi police captured the bear—his father. The bear was taken away to a transit camp to be sent to the East. But his mother the badger, a fiercely determined creature, used all her tricks and wiles to get the bear released. She came alive during these terrible times, and her great purpose in life was to help others survive. After the war, however, the bear and the badger went their separate ways.

Morosophe means wise fool, someone who speaks the truth despite danger, but in a playful and witty fashion, like the Fool in the Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Make Manfred the child of a Jewish father and a Gentile mother who divorced after the war. Notice how his mother and his grandparents became "Righteous Gentiles," and see them listed on the Wall of Honor in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. Give him a grandfather (who once held Communist-like ideals), with a strong sense of fairness and justice bred deep in his bones. And give him a younger brother who became part of his emotional support system to help them cope with a complex family situation.

The war ended. Many people celebrated, but the boy could not escape the images that were everywhere as many of the perpetrators were tried, and some even executed. Also, there were books in his house that showed the evil that had been committed—books that contained highly disturbing images: the ravaged bodies of those less fortunate than the bear—people who had died in concentration camps. The boy knew that many of his family members had also perished in these places. Although the bear had left the badger, trailing behind him was a long, dark cloud of guilt at abandoning the creature that had saved his life. The badger's unhappiness about the separation dulled her bright eyes, and very much affected the boy. To add to his unhappiness, when the boy was eight, his beloved grandmother died of pneumonia.

Give him also a family full of entrepreneurs, and a wealthy and successful father who said, "Son, you will never be a businessman." And make him a boy who saw that as a dare.

The years rolled by, and the routines of life settled in again. The boy was an excellent student, and was accepted into a better school than his parents could have ever imagined. The bear would visit occasionally. He would appear at odd moments to take the boy and his brother on short excursions. Sometimes, he would take them to the factories he was in charge of—places where everybody paid homage to him. His visits would stir up the dust of the boy's and his brother's life, then he would leave again. The bear would send postcards from exotic places with the terse message "Greetings from your father." These postcards caught the boy's imagination. He would think, "I must work hard to please the bear. I should try to become as important as him."

Spending time outdoors had always been essential to the boy. Discovering new things in the natural world made him feel truly alive. It created an oceanic feeling; it gave him a sense of limitlessness and oneness. In the outdoors, he felt connected to the forces of a collective unconscious. He spent as much time as possible outside the house, exploring the woods, streams, and fields.

When he was indoors, the boy read fairy tales, and also comics about Tintin, the young journalist-explorer, or Eric the Norseman, a Viking explorer. He often said he would like to be an explorer himself. Like Tintin, the boy was a hard-working, very persistent student, but not wise in the ways of the world. He was deceptively simple, but very ambitious, with a mother who had very little money. He knew he would never be a nobleman. So how could he please the bear?

All through his life, the carpenter (who had been almost beaten to death by Nazi sympathizers before the war) would repeat like the ticking of a clock that measured the time until a new adventure would begin: My boy, you must read; you must study; you must educate yourself; only through education will you have influence; only education will enable you to create a better world. The badger often talked about the terrible times that must never, ever, be repeated. Tick tock, tick tock. "Fairness, valor, strength, courage, persistence, resilience, danger, and fighting the arbitrary actions of powerful, evil people. Make the bear proud of you." All these themes played out in the boy's mind.

The carpenter, who had risked his life for the onderduikers, presented a challenge to the boy: there is good, and there is evil. The difference is very clear. A righteous man will defend what is fair, and do what's right, without hesitation. This was the second gift the boy received. And the boy gradually realized that the carpenter had foretold the path he must follow: study, learn, and work your way through education to attain a position where you can have some influence.

But this was not to be found in the little village. First of all, the boy would have to discover what it was that he should seek. No one in the village could tell him what he should look for, or who might help him with the challenge, or even in which direction to start out.

And so the boy set off with an empty sack on his shoulder on his quest for redemption. Some of the monsters had been slayed—for now. But the monsters were multi-headed. New ones could always emerge. Did the quest have something to do with destroying the nests where these monsters were hatched? He knew from his observations of anthills that even the most orderly, efficient and mercenary societies could be stirred up and altered. He also knew that not much was needed for evil to return. There were so many questions in his world, and so few answers. He needed to find out more.

Trying to please the bear, he went to a technical university to become an engineer, but it was not the right choice for him. Instead (after a short period of confusion), he decided to take a degree in economics. He knew that it was a negative choice but it left his options open. Still he did not know what he was seeking, only that he had not yet found it.

He took to the sea on a ship bound for America. Looking into the mirror, he saw a young man with the shadowy outline of a lone wolf.

In 1966, young Manfred went to America with a half-heartedly earned economics degree in his pocket, and a growing sense that economics didn't have all the answers. Place him at Harvard, and introduce him to the works of Freud and a somewhat contrarian

academic: Abraham Zaleznik, a business school professor who wanted to bring psychoanalytic concepts to the world of work. Let our explorer discover Freud's royal road to the unconscious: his own dreams.

Weave through the tale another leitmotif: "One of the small pleasures in life is doing things that people say you will (or can) never do." Another dare.

Bring him to France, where he is invited to teach at INSEAD, a new type of a business school, originally created to bring greater mutual understanding between the countries in Europe (the guiding motive being never to have war again), and begin his psychoanalytic training in Paris. Then have INSEAD fire him. Subsequently, after a short sojourn at Harvard, have him find like-minded colleagues in Canada, where Henry Mintzberg (another iconoclastic academic) was looking for faculty members who didn't fit the standard business school organizational behavior mold. Give our budding thinker the great good fortune to have found his wife Elisabet, an intelligent, patient, and wise companion.

In 1985, an older Manfred returns to INSEAD, first to teach the core course of organizational behavior in the MBA program, then to go on to create INSEAD's Challenge of Leadership: Creating Reflective Leaders program. One of the first business school seminars in the world for top executives, COL combined a business context and orientation with a framework for deep, prolonged self-reflection and renewal, both personal and professional.

To bring this personal fairy tale full circle, Manfred Kets de Vries is also a writer of fairy tales. In his book *Telling Fairytales in the Boardroom: How to Make Sure Your Organization Lives Happily Ever After*, he included a tale called *The Four Brothers, or how to build an effective team*. This tale, and the others in the book, touches on elements of Kets de Vries's own life and personality.

The farmer and his wife had four sons. The eldest one was quiet and studious. He watched birds, animals and insects at work. He often pointed out to others things they had not noticed. The second son was good with his hands. The third son was cheerful and strong, and he often found ways he and his brothers could work together. The youngest son was sharp-sighted, quick thinking, and a good hunter.

Times were hard, so the parents sent the four sons out into the world to seek their fortunes. The boys came to a crossroad, where they said goodbye and each took a separate path.

The oldest son met a stranger who said, "I am a glassmaker. I will teach you to make lenses to help you see the tiniest things on earth and the furthest objects in the sky."

The second son met a stranger who said, "I am a blacksmith. I will teach you how to work any metal on Earth, and to make anything anyone needs. It is very hard work, but you will learn to make things that are so beautiful they take people's breath away."

The third son met a sooty, jolly man. He laughed as he told the boy, "I am a chimneysweep, but no ordinary one. Come with me and I will teach you to scale greater heights than anyone else. You will climb and leap and twist and bound, and the people who see you will be amazed."

The youngest son met a huntsman, who told him, "Come with me, and I will teach you magical skills no huntsman has ever learned. You will see birds and beasts that no one has ever seen."

The tale climaxes when the four brothers return to their village with their hard-earned skills and magical tools of their new trades. Before long, they hear of a terrible beast rampaging through the kingdom. Combining their talents and wit, the four brothers track and kill the beast, and are rewarded by the grateful king.

Manfred Kets de Vries's education and early career path seem to parallel many of the tales he has spun. As he put it himself, "Confronted by several alternatives, I chose all of them." He returned from his adventures in North America, having followed multiple paths of study. His vision was sharpened, and he was ready to use his new abilities to create and build programs, and help people and organizations. His skills as a hunter and fisherman—patience, observation, and respect for his quarry—had been honed. When asked, "If your life were like a fairy tale, what would the monsters represent?" he replied: "Destructive, hubristic leaders who make other people's lives miserable."

Kets de Vries summed up a description of his early career: "I thought clinical work was interesting, but there were so many psychoanalysts about. Although they excel at helping people, very few of them understand the world of work. But organizations play an enormous role in people's lives. I saw that many people were suffering at work, employed in organizations that operated like gulags. I wondered how people knowledgeable in the helping profession and management scholars could combine their forces."

Being a "prophet," however, can make for a very lonely life. In a way, Kets de Vries in his early career was like the prophet Jeremiah, because at first, no matter how hard he tried to tell people about the importance of taking a more in-depth look at organizations to understand the darker side, very few would listen to him. At times, he said, it felt like he was talking to a brick wall. And like every "innovator," Kets de Vries admits he was subject to feelings of rejection, depression, and discouragement. What saved him was his sense of humor—his sense of the absurd. But the challenge he took on to deliver unpopular messages to traditional academics and leaders of organizations caused him mental anguish, and made him sometimes laughable and annoying in the eyes of many people. But because Kets de Vries cared about the quality of life in organizations, he kept going, repeating the same message.

"To help sharpen my ideas, I was intrigued by what the interface of psychoanalysis and management science could offer. Working on the boundaries—this transitional, creative

space—can help you to see what other people can't see. No wonder that in my work I often need to play the role of the morosophe—the wise fool—to get people to look at life from different perspectives. Like in the allegory of Plato's cave, I want people to have a three-dimensional outlook on life. I want them to use different lenses. I wanted them to stop being strangers to themselves. And I think I have made a small contribution at the interface of these two disciplines.”

Curriculum Vitae

Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries is a seminal thinker in the clinical study of organizational life. His specific areas of interest are leadership, career dynamics, executive stress, entrepreneurship, family business, succession planning, cross-cultural management, building high performance teams, executive coaching, and the facilitation of organizational transformation and change. In his work, he goes beyond the surface-level challenges of business, government, and non-for-profit organizations, and calls for investigation of the deeper sources of energy and motivational forces that drive human actions.

In addition to his work as a chaired business school professor and practicing psychoanalyst, Manfred Kets de Vries was the founder of the INSEAD Global Leadership Centre (IGLC). In 2003, at its inception, IGLC was based on Kets de Vries' research findings and experiences with executives. Soon after, IGLC became one of the first leadership development centers in the world to address the link between self-awareness and effectiveness in the workplace. The work of setting up this center also created a tipping point in Kets de Vries' career. Before, he focused more on the darker side of leadership and organizations; as the founding director of IGLC, his interest became more focused on the question of how to make talented people even better.

To enable people transformation, IGLC became also one of the first centers to introduce a group coaching methodology to personal and organizational change. Since its inception, tens of thousands of INSEAD participants have experienced IGLC group coaching sessions. Moreover, Kets de Vries' conceptualizations about the darker and brighter side of leadership spread throughout the school. He has also supported the development of the Center for Leadership Development Research at ESMT, Berlin, a fast-growing business school that was ready to recognize the power of group coaching in executive development and change.

More recently, the independent Kets de Vries Institute (KDVI) was founded to continue Manfred Kets de Vries' educational and research activities. After stepping down from the leadership of IGLC, Manfred Kets de Vries (with partners Elisabet Engellau, Oriane Kets de Vries and many associates), formed this unusual boutique-consulting firm to focus on organizational research, leadership issues, teaching, consulting, and executive coaching.

The Financial Times, *Le Capital*, *Wirtschaftswoche*, and *The Economist* have rated Kets de Vries among the world's top fifty leading management thinkers and one of the most influential contributors to human resource management. He has been given many honors, including Lifetime Achievement Awards for his contributions to leadership development in the US and Germany. He also became the first Fellow of the Academy of Management at INSEAD. In addition, he received two honorary doctorates. Kets de Vries is also a Distinguished Affiliate Professor at the ESMT, Berlin. He is author, co-author or editor of over 40 books and 400 articles and blogs that have been translated into 31 languages. Furthermore, he is the author of a more than a hundred case studies of which six have received the Best Case of the Year Award. The Dutch Government has honored him by making him an Officer in the Order of Oranje Nassau.

But when asked which of his accomplishments he is most proud of, Kets de Vries said, "My children all seem to like each other. They get along extremely well. It's something special as this is not the case in many families."

Bringing the “right side of the brain” back into organizations

The influences of psychological, emotional, and social factors have become hot topics that generate great interest in the fields of behavioral economics and behavioral finance. “Soft” topics such as organizational behavior and authentic leadership are gaining increasing respect and interest. However, in the mid-1960s when Kets de Vries embarked on his intellectual journey, the integration of two different paradigms—management science (the neo-classical economic view of organizations with its emphasis on human rationality), and the psychoanalytic study of human behavior in all its variations (the clinical orientation)—was a new and very controversial approach.

Serendipity is the word Kets de Vries uses to explain how he came to combine economics, John Maynard Keynes’s “dismal science,” with psychoanalysis, Freud’s “impossible profession.”

After his short and not very productive stint studying chemical and mechanical engineering, Kets de Vries earned an advanced degree in economics in the Netherlands in 1966, but he was not fully convinced that economic theories provided all the answers to organizational dilemmas. During his childhood, he had seen with his own eyes that people in organizations are not always act rationally. The received wisdom that people consistently try to obtain optimal outcomes seemed, to him, to be frequently contradicted. Unexplained motivational drivers could, on occasion, lead to counterproductive or dangerous outcomes. But what were those motivational drivers, and how did they work?

As an “explorer” (something that had come naturally to Kets de Vries since childhood), in his search for further understanding he turned to the disciplines of management science and organizational behavior. However, he again ended up puzzled—but as he would say later in life, “If you aren’t confused, you don’t know what’s going on.” Traditional organizational behavior studies at the time focused mainly on structures and systems—

how to control people in a rational way—rather than paying attention to the dynamic psychological forces that underlie human behavior in organizations. On the rare occasions when a consideration of the human element was added to the equation, the emphasis seemed to be on a few “universal” parsimonious patterns in the behavior of individuals, rather than looking at people in organizations as not only unique, but also simultaneously embedded in extremely complex and diverse social networks. As Kets de Vries put it, “I wanted to bring the person back into the organization.”

With his economics degree in his pocket, and a wish to put off looking for a corporate job, he talked himself into the International Teachers Program at the Harvard Business School, a great opportunity to spend a year in the United States. (He had been at Harvard many years before as a Summer School student, an experience that had stayed with him during his years of study in Holland.) He booked himself a berth on a Norwegian freighter and was off on another adventure.

The International Teachers Program focused on spreading the gospel of the case study method to educators from around the world, and included traditional business school courses such as business policy, international economics, comparative marketing, and so on. But one course in particular caught Kets de Vries’ eye: Abraham Zaleznik’s “Psychoanalytic Psychology and Organizational Theory.” He signed up for the course, a decision that would change his life. It might have had something to do with the very different subject matter he was asked to read; but perhaps it also had something to do with Zaleznik, who reminded him of his father. Both men were “bear-like” extremely charismatic individuals.

Bears have always had a special place in Kets de Vries’ imagination. “I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t intrigued by bears,” he writes in *Talking to the Shaman Within: Musings on Hunting*. “To me, they are the arch symbol of the wilderness. They inspire awe and dread; but they also have regenerative powers. They take life, and they give life. They can be endearing or menacing. They attract and repel. In many ways the sacredness of the bear still occupies our unconscious. They resonate with a wild, more primitive,

primeval part of the human animal. In tribal rituals, the death of a bear is not truly death, but the beginning of a transformative experience. They disappear in the winter, to return in the spring. Bears are a symbol of a transitional world.”

In the seminar taught by Professor Zaleznik, Kets de Vries was introduced to the works of Sigmund Freud. Although he later questioned the validity of some of Freud’s interpretations and theories, at the time Freud’s case histories such as *The Wolf Man* and *The Rat Man* opened a completely new way of looking at human behavior. For Kets de Vries, this meant moving from a two-dimensional to a more three dimensional world. In addition, living a transitional life in a foreign country created considerable mental turmoil that provoked learning far beyond his Harvard coursework. In particular, he started paying attention to dreams and fantasies, his own and other people’s.

Kets de Vries completed a combined ITP, MBA and doctoral program (DBA), with Zaleznik as his doctoral supervisor, at the Harvard Business School in record time. At last, he was better equipped to understand not only the business side—issues, symbols, language, and culture in organizations—but also to decipher some of the less visible undercurrents in people and organizations. After returning to INSEAD, he worked hard to make known what he had learned. He was given INSEAD’s Distinguished Teaching award five times (and is considered witty and wise according to some). He wanted young people who aspired to become business practitioners to understand that they might be somewhat “unbalanced,” with the left side of their brain overdeveloped—business life is more than the simple application of financial, operations research, and marketing tools. And his central theme remained: bringing the person back into the organization and creating better places to work.

His doctoral thesis focused on entrepreneurs, which is not surprising given his father and brothers’ entrepreneurial careers. His interest in entrepreneurs and the psychodynamics of family businesses has continued throughout his career, as these are domains where his “clinical approach” can be especially effective. Zaleznik also involved him in a very large study on organizational stress. Kets de Vries realized that these topics were interrelated;

the stress research highlighted the effects of cultural socialization on the manifestation, overt or covert, of stress at the individual and organizational level. This dual research focus would put a lasting stamp on his research interests and would become a key aspect of his research on leadership and other organizational phenomena.

This early post-graduate research project on stress influenced Kets de Vries's research methodology. He had observed that quantitative experiments in psychology, often conducted in behavioral "laboratories" far removed from daily life, gave only limited insight into a person's way of functioning. So as well as using standard personality tests in his stress study, he included a qualitative, narrative approach—attentive, lengthy, deep and open-ended interviews, with rich descriptions of context and history—that provided much more data for further analysis. Although he later developed several multi-party leadership behavior survey instruments (e.g. Kets de Vries, Vrignaud, and Florent-Treacy, 2004; Kets de Vries, Vrignaud, Korotov, Engellau, and Florent-Treacy, 2006) that have been used for quantitative research purposes (e.g. Ibarra and Obodaru, 2009; Guillen, Mayo, and Korotov, 2015), he has always been a keen advocate for a qualitative or mixed-methods approach. In addition, his increasing interest in the application of a psychodynamic orientation to exploring organizational issues meant that he was able to put into practice what he had always sensed: objectivity is an illusion. He was also beginning to understand why very ordinary people could do very evil things. These insights stimulated him much later in his career to write a book on the subject, *Lessons on Leadership by Terror: Finding a Shaka Zulu in the Attic* (2005). In this psycho-historical study he makes it clear that it doesn't take much to make the human animal regress to very primitive, destructive behavior.

The stress study and further work with Zaleznik, including a co-authored book, *Power and the Corporate Mind* (1975), motivated Kets de Vries to undergo his own psychoanalytic training. At that time, the early 1970s, Kets de Vries's background in economics made him an atypical candidate for psychoanalytical studies. But he was fortunate in that, while working with Zaleznik, he received an offer from INSEAD to

become part of the growing faculty at the new institution. Once he had returned to France, where the psychoanalytic community has always been far more open to candidates with unconventional backgrounds, he was able to begin psychoanalytic training in Paris. He started psychoanalysis with Joyce McDougall, whose seminal work on the “inner theater” of significant figures inside each one of us (McDougall, 1980, 1989) would become an influential framework for his own thinking on the psychological processes that influence people’s behavior in organizations. Joyce MacDougall was to be his clinical supervisor until her death in 2011.

After two years in France (1971–1973), Kets de Vries began to miss the dynamic North American culture. He was also fired from INSEAD at that time, the reason being—according to Kets de Vries—that he was too vocal about ways the school could be run better. He returned to the Harvard Business School as a research fellow, having just married Elisabet, who already had two young children. As the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute was interested in broadening its entry policy to extend beyond psychiatrists, he was offered training at that institution. There was only one catch: he needed to have a more permanent job to pay for his education, which a temporary research fellowship at Harvard would not stretch to cover. But due to a history of conflict between Abraham Zaleznik and the members of the OB department at the Harvard Business School, he did not receive an offer. It’s likely that, as a disciple of the somewhat troublesome Zaleznik, he was viewed as being “contaminated.” At the time, one of the more prominent OB faculty members expressed his opinion that Kets de Vries would never amount to much and would never write anything of significance. Yet another dare.

However, McGill University in Montreal, Canada, was interested in new faculty members from diverse backgrounds. Henry Mintzberg, known for his unorthodox views on management education, was far more open-minded than the OB faculty at the Harvard Business School at the time. He offered Kets de Vries a faculty position. Ironically, at the same time, Kets de Vries also received an offer from INSEAD, which he declined. He accepted Mintzberg’s offer, which was made especially attractive due to the existence of

an active psychoanalytic society in Montreal that worked closely with the university. While working at McGill, his second psychoanalyst, Maurice Dongier, Head of Psychiatry at McGill University and director of the Allan Memorial Institute, a major mental health hospital and think tank, encouraged Kets de Vries to research the more creative and clinical aspects of work, then quite contrary to the existing mainstream academic management agenda. Again, Kets de Vries's thirst for the real-life relevance of research attracted him to psychiatric interventions, such as "patient of the week" seminars where clinicians from the entire institution came together to discuss difficult cases and reflect on the best treatment of choice. While working with his own patients, and presenting his patients' case histories to his supervisors, he became more immersed in the clinical approach: "I learned how to listen and observe empathetically. I came to understand how human lives are played out in recurring patterns, and how those patterns influence behavior."

Particularly influential in Kets de Vries's worldview—in addition to his doctoral advisor Abraham Zaleznik and his psychoanalysts, Joyce McDougall and Maurice Dongier—were the psychologists he encountered at Harvard and McGill. The contributions of Lester Luborsky, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, on core conflictual relationship themes (Luborsky and Crits-Cristophe, 1998) also provided useful insight into how behavior is influenced by the way people believe others will react to them. The ideas of Joseph Lichtenberg, founder of the Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, about emotional need systems shed more light for Kets de Vries on the attachment/affiliatory and exploratory needs of people in organizations. Erik Erikson, who had taught Kets de Vries at Harvard, introduced him to lifecycles and identity development. Other well-known psychoanalysts/psychiatrists such as Carl Jung, Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion enriched his insights into human behavior. His life-long intellectual sparring partner and friend, Sudhir Kakar, psychoanalyst, cultural anthropologist, novelist, and long-time collaborator on INSEAD's The Challenge of Leadership program, helped him to broaden his view of humanity.

Kets de Vries's career eventually took him back to INSEAD. For many years he was a Clinical Chaired Professor of Leadership Development and Organizational change. From September 1992 until March 2013, when he semi-retired as required by French law, he held the Raoul de Vitry d'Avaucourt Chair of Leadership Development at INSEAD. Subsequently, he became the Distinguished Clinical Professor of Leadership Development and Organizational Change at INSEAD.

Key Contributions and New Insights

Manfred Kets de Vries is one of a second-generation cohort of scholars such as Elliott Jaques, Abraham Zaleznik, and Harry Levinson who pioneered a clinical orientation in the world of work.

Kets de Vries's two objectives—integrating management science and psychodynamic-systemic analysis, and making management scholars more attuned to applied research—stem from his wish to improve the performance of organizations and the quality of life of their people. As he puts it himself, “Creating meaning is very important to me.” The search for meaning has guided his contribution to a deeply humanistic and highly pragmatic approach to management science and business education.

The clinical paradigm and the real world of work

Kets de Vries' work is influenced by many other disciplines besides psychoanalysis. Although he is a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association, The Canadian Psychoanalytic Society, and the French Psychoanalytic Society, he is anything but a traditional psychoanalyst. In his work (apart from concepts taken from management science), he incorporates ideas from family systems theory, infant observation, strategic psychotherapy, neuroscience, dynamic psychiatry, cognitive theory, social psychology, anthropology, and ethology. For example, Kets de Vries took an anthropological

approach to studying teams by observing pygmies in the African rain forest (Kets de Vries, 1999). Essentially, he is eclectic in his scholarly work and interventions. The clinical orientation, however, stands central. “Simply put,” he explains, “the term ‘clinical’ originally meant ‘by the bedside.’ I use this term to highlight the fact that rather than relying on pre-written case studies about executives you may never have met or know only superficially, I prefer to work with the real, current stories and challenges of people in organizations.” He was one of the first to move away from the standard case study teaching method based on somewhat simplified (and usually sanitized) published accounts (although he wrote more than 100 traditional case studies himself), to focus instead on the work and lives of the actual people in his classrooms or seminars.

Kets de Vries presents the clinical paradigm as based on four premises.

- There is a logical explanation for the way people act—even for actions that seem irrational. But to make sense of this—to find the red threads—you have to be something of an organizational detective.
- A great deal of mental life—feelings, fears, and motives—lies outside our conscious awareness. Though hidden from rational thought, the human unconscious affects (and in some cases even dictates) our conscious reality and even our physical wellbeing.
- Nothing is more central to whom a person is than the way he or she regulates and expresses emotions. Emotions color experiences with positive and negative connotations, creating preference in the choices we make, and the way we deal with the world.
- Human development is a complex inter- and intrapersonal process; we are all products of our past experiences, and those experiences, including the developmental experiences given by our caretakers, continue to influence us throughout life.

In one of his earliest, seminal contributions to the organizational literature, *The Neurotic Organization* (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984), Kets de Vries argues that it is important to understand the inner world of individuals in order to determine what is really going on in organizations. In this book he points out the extent to which personality, leadership style, decision-making, and corporate culture are interconnected. He explains that the boundary between normality and pathology is sometimes hard to determine, even in organizations.

This real world “clinical” approach to the study of organizations later became one of the key methodological pillars in Kets de Vries’ pedagogical philosophy. The starting point would become the individual—his or her concerns, hopes, fears, fantasies and regrets—and the respective reactions from observers within the individual’s context. Much of Kets de Vries’s research and teaching would draw on real-life cases of people working with issues important to them. Likewise, his organizational interventions would become arenas for practice (helping a specific person with leadership challenges) as well as further thinking and exploration.

Universal motivational drivers

The second key pillar of Kets de Vries’ work is a deep attention to the fundamental and universal factors that motivate all human beings. He emphasizes the need for exploration and learning, or *fun*; the need for affiliation and community, or *love*; and the need for a sense of purpose, or *meaning*. When these need systems are met in organizations—in a way that is appropriate for a professional setting—people feel comfortable, trusted, engaged, and creative. As Kets de Vries points out in *Sex, Money, Happiness, and Death* (2nd edition, 2015) and other writings, we all struggle with the inability to accept the end of our personal existence. People turn to what he termed “the drugs against meaningless and death”: fame, lust, power, and on the more positive side, spirituality, ecology, and procreation (whether through children or creative pursuits). But there is a high price attached to our fear of death—our lingering “stealth motivator,” as he calls it. He writes: “It leaves unfulfilled a basic need for making meaning and achieving closure.” In essence, people are paradoxically driven by a fear of death, and a desire to deny their

mortality. As glum as this may sound, he argues that organizations that foster affiliation, playfulness, and meaning help people deal with this existential dilemma in a positive way.

Clinical approaches to leadership development

In practical terms, Kets de Vries has argued that confrontation with the reasons for sub-optimal behaviors in business settings typically involves investigation of fundamental, existential issues. This proposition, like the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, has made many people—faculty and executive participants alike—uncomfortable. But unlike many of his executive education and business school faculty colleagues, Kets de Vries never shied away from the challenge.

By the early 2000s, business schools were catching up with the demand for off-site opportunities for leader development combined with reflective space. They began to realize that executives feel a need to stop running around and give themselves the space to think about the past and the future. Business school programs increasingly became laboratories where executives could experiment with change (Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007; Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2012; Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2016; Korotov, 2016).

In the first period of his academic career, Kets de Vries spent a considerable amount of time studying the darker side of leadership and organizations. He warned of the dangers of narcissistic behavior, the pitfall of hubris, and the covert forces that could contribute to organizational derailment. But then in 1991, well ahead of trends to come, he established a senior leadership executive education program—The Challenge of Leadership—designed to be a learning laboratory in which executives could experiment with personal and professional change and development. COL was one of the first and most successful programs to integrate a psychodynamic-systemic orientation to change people and organizations. Kets de Vries was also among the first to develop and deploy a peer coaching method where participants become “live” case studies, as they present their own

organizational challenges and their personal struggles directly or indirectly connected to them. They are encouraged to think outside the box and discover new ways to look at knotty issues. They also experience the power of group coaching, and learn to be effective peer coaches. The participants provide one another with an exceedingly rare and precious opportunity to break the syndrome of isolation at the top.

In 2000, after the success of the COL, Kets de Vries (with Erik van de Loo and Roger Lehman), developed the Consulting and Coaching for Change (CCC) program at INSEAD. This program helped its participants understand that “soft” skills are actually the “hardest” skills to learn. The program, which offers a Master’s degree and is given on two continents, has become a beacon of excellence, differentiating INSEAD from other business schools. These two programs alone now have more than 1000 alumni throughout the world.

Group coaching and psychodynamic-systemic feedback surveys

In group coaching, a method described explicitly in his book *The Hedgehog Effect: The Secrets of Building High Performance Teams*, he describes his intervention technique as “not therapy, but therapeutic.” Four to six participants harness the power of the group as they explore the connections between each other’s personal and professional challenges. Guided by an executive coach, participants use a Socratic approach, asking open questions and building a collective interpretation. Through the interpretation of the messages found in 360° feedback; the opportunity to tell their personal stories in a respectful atmosphere; deeper understanding of their own behavioral patterns; mental experimentation, cathartic experiences, role modeling, and the support of the peer group; participants are able to identify areas where they want to focus their change efforts. The facilitator contains the emotional tension, creates a safe transitional space, and observes or describes the group dynamics, again, using all the available information to deepen insights. Kets de Vries says, “Repetition of the same message from different people in different forms is a good way to create tipping points, and to help people make lasting changes. Many of my change efforts start with people’s narratives. And at heart,

everyone responds to stories. As humans, we are tuned to listening to stories, and to applying them to make sense of our experiences. This allows people to explore and rewrite their own life stories.”

Kets de Vries developed one of the first suites of 360° feedback tools to integrate the clinical paradigm in a holistic approach to exploring participants’ inner worlds in relation to their professional or career questions and challenges. This approach includes colleagues, clients, superiors, friends and family members in the feedback process. He calls this “720° feedback.” As he points out, “I have seen some people look at less than positive feedback from colleagues and try to rationalize it by saying, ‘My boss is an idiot, my colleagues are idiots, and my subordinates are idiots.’ But if a person’s daughter reports, ‘Papa is an idiot’ then he has to admit that there may some truth to it. It could turn into a tipping point for change.” To date, tens of thousands of executives have gone through this process at INSEAD.

As well as being one of the first (if not the first) on the market for group coaching in a business school context, Kets de Vries has also trained major service providers including the well-known strategic consulting firm McKinsey in the group coaching method, and is on McKinsey’s Board for Leadership Development. The interest consulting powerhouses show in Kets de Vries’s approach is not accidental. Change researchers and practitioners alike are quite clear about the power of human resistance to change. The more rational approaches to planning and implementing change fail to take into account the developments in people’s inner theater that can take very dramatic forms during times of change, often associated with perceived threats to their wellbeing and inner view of self.

Legacies and Unfinished Business

Manfred Kets de Vries’s legacy is particularly significant in the light of recent criticisms of the leadership development, executive coaching and consulting industry (Kellerman,

2012; Pfeffer, 2015). All too often, when participating in such interventions for a hefty fee, executives hear inspirational advice and ideological wishful thinking in a one-size-fits-all approach. Attendees of leadership programs might feel good about themselves for a short while, but they quickly lose their motivation—and their good intentions—when they return to their office. Kets de Vries constantly warns participants, faculty and coaches about the risks of the temporary “high” associated with the feel-good factor of hearing inspirational stories while relaxing in the Fontainebleau forest or elsewhere. He constantly reiterates that change is hard work, that most change efforts fail, that much perceived change is illusory and that people have ingrained habits. Instead, he encourages a more realistic view of executive tasks and an honest evaluation of the costs associated with leading people and organizations and implementing organizational change.

Kets de Vries and his associates have drawn attention to the need for higher levels of psychological awareness for all those involved in executive education and development, including the need to also work on coaches and academics’ unresolved personal issues, which may affect their own ability to support their target audiences of students and executives. He calls for critical reflection on teaching, coaching and consulting practice and encourages people to do for themselves what they encourage their students, participants, and clients to do: taking time and space for self reflection and getting feedback from others.

Throughout his career, Kets de Vries has pushed the boundaries in management science and leadership development practice with a single-minded focus. As a result, he has been criticized for repeating the same philosophical message in his various publications. He has contributed from a very early period to more practitioner-oriented research. He jokes that too many articles in academic journals focus on White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic, Organized—*WEIRDO*—executives, are read by no one, and don’t change the world. Some academic colleagues consider his later, more pragmatic approach to be less of a contribution. Although his earlier articles appeared in top academic

journals, he later decided to try to communicate directly with people in organizations through more accessible types of publications—like blogs, video clips, and mini-articles for the *Harvard Business Review* and *INSEAD Knowledge* (collected and developed in *Riding the Leadership Roller Coaster: An Observer's Guide*, Palgrave, 2016).

He has frequently been told that his psychodynamic-systemic orientation is not relevant or appropriate for what is considered to be serious management science research. He has also been criticized for focusing too frequently on the darker side of leadership and human behavior. Indeed, the themes of sex, money, (un)happiness, and death are often present in his work. The morosophe continues to tap leaders on the shoulder and remind them to be vigilant and remember what lies beneath.

Kets de Vries has often been described as an iconoclast. For many years at INSEAD, his work and methodology were discounted as not being rigorous or scientific. PhD candidates were strongly discouraged by the organizational behavior area from working with him, as it was seen as potential career suicide. (Kets de Vries is a member of INSEAD's entrepreneurship area.) Most of his PhD students have come to him from other institutions and all have done very well in their careers.

There have been times when Kets de Vries has looked at his life's work and felt that it could be summed up as a "sideshow" to what people view as important in business schools and organizations. However, when considered over a lifetime, it is clear that he has been at the forefront in creating a significant paradigm shift in the way business schools think about and teach topics associated with human behavior in organizations. Leadership development with a component of personal reflection is now a sine qua non for virtually all executive programs, including those delivered at top schools such as Harvard, INSEAD, IMD, ESMT, and the London Business School. Kets de Vries was also one of the first to spread his ideas globally, working in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South America, and Russia. He is considered to be the "patriarch" of a Master's degree program, Psychoanalytic Psychology and Management Consulting, at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, the country's most prestigious research university in

the field. Directors of top consulting firms such as McKinsey and Bain have worked with Kets de Vries, and are now integrating a psychodynamic-systemic component in their strategy development interventions. Even the way MBAs are taught—a supertanker-like pedagogy that is very slow to change course—has been influenced by the live case study approach and Kets de Vries’s group coaching methodology.

Last but not least, business school research, particularly in organizational behavior departments, has increasingly integrated qualitative methods such as theory building from case studies, narrative analysis, and interpretive phenomenological analysis. Moving away from reliance on the laboratory-based quantitative methods long favored by psychologists, qualitative methods are now better established as being rich and rigorous in many top academic journals. The end result is more real-world and relevant research findings that are useful to people in organizations. Established academics in the field of management science have begun to see the powerful potential in bringing the clinical paradigm to an exploration of organizational phenomena, and combining quantitative methods with a deeper look at the reality of human and social systems (e.g. Loch, 2010). Dozens of participants in INSEAD’s CCC executive Master’s program have gone on to pursue PhDs or practitioner-oriented doctoral work in related fields. Here again, Kets de Vries was ahead of his time. In October 2015, he was the first beneficiary of the INSEAD Dominique Héau Award for Inspiring Educational Excellence.

Most importantly, Kets de Vries’ legacy is to have broken out of the old paradigm of “the man in the gray flannel suit,” the machine-like worker completely devoid of any humanity, the rational calculator of pleasure and pain. Kets de Vries has always argued that it is possible to create thriving organizations with healthy individuals, organizations that he calls *authentizotic* (Kets de Vries, 2001; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1999). The term describes places where people are invigorated by their work, and is derived from two Greek words: *authentikos*, which means to behave authentically, and *zoteikos*, which means “vital to life.”

Authentizotic organizations are the antidote to the dehumanizing daily life most people experience at work. Without fanfare and pre-packaged “vision statements,” authentizotic workplaces have a culture of “love, fun and meaning.” They are places in which, rather than “leading lives of quiet desperation,” people feel at their best, and as a result are more creative and engaged.

What next?

Never quite satisfied, Kets de Vries constantly asks, “What’s next?”

The leitmotiv, once again, is exploring connections. Bringing management science and psychodynamic-systemic concepts together created a powerful connection that allows people to understand the development of their own identity. Bringing the likes of Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Wilfred Bion and Donald Winnicott into the business school classroom, Kets de Vries was one of the very first to show people how to think about the connections between their personal experiences and their professional role.

Kets de Vries has an intense interest in identity formation, which relates to his focus on authenticity. He has always emphasized that our identity does not only emerge from conscious contemplation of what we want to do with our life, but that many out-of-awareness processes also affect this process and may stand in our way. This makes for a constant oscillation between a true and false self, so that identity is multi-faceted and loaded with both positive and negative imagery. Explaining this dilemma, he says, “All too often, children are sent on a ‘mission impossible,’ to fulfill their parents’ wishes for them—the things that the parents would have liked to do but were never able to do. At the same time, what may be forgotten is, what does the child (and the later adult) really want to do? An exploration of one’s true and false selves, and an acceptance of one’s own desires, becomes an essential step toward authenticity in the workplace. The other challenge is to break generational dysfunctional processes—not to get stuck in vicious

circles and repeating the mistakes of previous generations. We should always keep in mind that when you realize you are riding a dead horse, it is time to dismount.”

It is probably fair to say that our collective fear of exploring human nature and integrating this kind of introspective journey into the workplace is receding. The current trend is toward ever more general managers, line managers and employees actively thinking about the patterns that may link their personal and professional experiences, leading to healthier, more informed choices about what already works, and what they would like to work on. The next frontier—the next boundary to be crossed—is to truly, deeply integrate this new paradigm into the fabric of organizations. Here Manfred Kets de Vries is still at the forefront with his organization-wide interventions: “Leaders of organizations, in particular the CEOs and boards of directors, must have the kinds of courageous conversations that allow and promote diversity, humanity, trust, and mutual respect. They must accept their own vulnerability. To be effective leaders, humility, humanity, and courage become essential characteristics. They must set the example by refusing to promulgate elements of culture that underlie such issues as stress, burnout, and gender bias. It is the people in organizations themselves who must refuse to follow destructive leaders. We need more morosophes at places of work, to create organizations whose members have a healthy disrespect for their boss and where people have voice.”

Manfred Kets de Vries’s daughter Oriane says: “In many instances, my father’s insights have mirrored his life events. The ebb and flow of his life—including periods of feeling low—have made him think about the nature of happiness, and being unhappy. Preoccupied with tragic transience of life, he keeps churning out books and articles. My mother, and many other significant people in his life have been his often unrecognized teachers of the softer sides of human nature. They have helped him to reconcile and forgive. Very observant and continuously motivated to learn—being remarkably perceptive, witty, and also very single minded—he has always applied his life’s insights directly to his work.”

Forty-odd years after he set off on his adventure to North America, Manfred Kets de Vries still asks himself whether his life is driven by a quest for redemption. What made him the morosophe of organizations? Why has he been such a Jeremiah, a lamenting “tragic man?” As a psychoanalyst, he knows, of course, that his early role models have affected him deeply. Asked whether he has found what he has been looking for, he says, “Of course not! Will I ever? I hope not. I like to keep on exploring and learning. If you stop learning, you’re dead. The older I become, the more I realize how little I know. I was much more sure of myself when I was younger. At my stage in life—now I’m beyond my expiry date—the thought of what to leave behind for the next generation has become increasingly important. We always need to ask ourselves, what are we doing for others? What impact have we had on other people’s lives? To me, that responsibility is more than ever relevant. My hope is to end up with not too many regrets. At the same time, I think, like Hans Christian Andersen, that ‘life itself is the most wonderful fairy tale’.”

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